Pulling Bones

Miriam de Uriarte

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Acknowledgments

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– Victor Muñoz

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in memory of
William Antonio de Uriarte

Pulling Bones

I
Becoming

Pulling Bones

White flesh underwater
fire of blue tropical pools.
In the first exploding breath above water
The scent of coffee and purple jacaranda
The cobblestones lead to a white table.

Far to the north she begins pulling bones
from the wall – leaves with what she can carry.
Here: clay pots frozen by fire – each
olla a well where she will drop offerings
beans, *chiles*, her gold wedding band.

All day she borders the other country,
she goes back and forth recalling her mother's
face. In the market pinwheels of color turn slowly
a smooth brown foot under white awnings
and a pyramid of red tomatoes.

Coming out of the bakery her face reflected
is the red neon face of the moon over the desert
where a man who leads her horse
hides his eyes behind a straw mask.
Near the barbed wire fence they
dine on delicate cactus – a sweet
relief from this new way of life

she cannot completely know.

When much later she takes the train
to a canyon with an ancient past
she can hear rocks moving beside her
like friendly beasts between
urine soaked stations – women in
T-shirts pass watermelon-red
slices of shadows through the open windows.

She remembers the black cat
at home waiting to be lit by
the first tongues of sun.

Driving Home

for my father

On the highway headlights push through the dark.
I am driving home,
south, towards you.

Grapevines are curling behind me.
Hidden they bear their fruit in the dark,
Beyond the pole fences catching the headlights
cows are chewing slowly.

Somewhere a man is touching his daughter
and she is leaving him
she is walking away
crossing borders that click behind her.

Under the lights night lifts like a skirt
an old man's voice is telling me
there is almost no time
days hack at his life.

When I lift the receiver
your voice reminds me of my grandmother's,
she is saying, "hello, hello Miri?"
We talk like two old women now
passing words mapping the way
over the muddy river, south.

In the dream we float above green valleys
to the '*zaguan*' where the old Indian
shows us his bottle top mosaic:
an image of Zapata.
You leave me this.

Framing the Past 1915

It's Christmas.
I am home saying good-bye to no one.
On the shelf I have made an altar,
a frame with seven black and white photos.
First, bedraggled men riding
past who probably never have
had their picture taken. Each
carries a rifle, a bullet belt.

My father and grandfather are
standing on the sidewalk with others

who have come to watch the Zapatistas
enter Mexico City. Above, two
passport photos – decisive
moments before the escape: a man with white
hair in a three piece suit, below a woman
her dark eyes fixed on me. Next my father
in his flannel shirt, hands in his pocket,
younger, but older than the child
ridding a rocking horse, clasping
the head of his equine. In the lower
corner is a small photo taken long after
the rocking horse was snapped – a child
who does not expect her picture to be
taken – a pretty child with a bow on her pinafore.

The young ones know nothing of soldiers
or of revolutions. They have only just begun
to leap into the air feeling the belly of the plane
rock beneath them – have barely begun
to see the peaks below part as they pass.

Amanacer

Gray light framed: calls –
news – trilling among the trees –
a dove half-swallowing
its smaller song – welcome
morning! Life – the progress of light
kneading fire clouds that rise rolling
into the oven of day.

Deep in These Waters

Beginning…
a moment, a day, a time
a place together –

beginning as a ship moving away from the dock,
motors reversed –
the small bay still in the early morning light
and barely beginning to warm yellow and white
buildings
at the foot of the green hills –
a motion towards sea, direction to an unknown port,
the hull
sunk below the water mark – the blue-green sea – I
am moving against the waves
like a ship I am moving out, dropping my moorings,
feeling myself gently lifted I move towards you
deep in these waters.

The Airport

I.
After the click comes panic, the rush of desperation, the conviction I must go back for something left on the other side of the door. Nothing will ever be the same, something I long to complete to live out like the life of a wave. The door seals the separation. Alone. Locked out are faces I love, people who touched me, talk to me in dreams. They are saying something, mouthing the words slowly over and over, but I cannot make them out. There are men in uniforms. They have stamped me in. They

are part of the door. It is always night, always the hard side of the moon, the plane is at the dark end of the tunnel. There is no going back to my tousled bed. My heels, my hat are my armor.

There's no going back, though I'll try, I'll try over and over again for the rest of my life, I'll keep going through gates, listening for the click, watching the man stamp who I am and where I've been in purple ink. I'll look back trying to find this faces that knock at my dreams, and I'll long to pull the covers over my head for just one more hour of sleep.

II.
Yellow, blue, white luxury of water swirling, light refracted, confusion of air, muscle, skin pulling to emerge, air torn lungs, the swaying waves above surface, sand dashed legs, all of life green and bright and beautiful, every palm tree a clear frond, a specific piece of the mountain side, rocks flat, tilted vertical, torn and reassembled in wet black ink, cliffs to blue sky, mangroves lifting bone-toed stepping in water, coral reefs press to shore in wafered layers meet life edging out. I want to stay here forever in the sand cold then hot loving the crunch of it sliding to outline the contours of fingers, elbows, breasts, thighs, sealing my skin like a kiln seals wet clay.

III.
In the beginning there were children and there was clay. The children looked at the clay and felt the energy of excitement flowing into their fingertips. They touched, pounded, poked, pulled, pinched and squeezed. The clay wiggled in their fingers. It opened, closed, broke and was stacked. The children chortled with joy. They had discovered their power. They spoke for the clay, moving to mimic the creatures, articulating the lost worlds they were part of. They imagined themselves to be animals, becoming the thing taking shape before them. When a child says, "I made this", he or she is saying, "I can make this", "I am this", "I AM!".

Xoloitzcuincle

Put down
3,500 years ago
a dog named Xolotl

god of rain next
to his master sharing
the fate of the dispossessed;

commenced the journey,
taking his master
underground to cross

the river of treacherous
waters; almost went
extinct, the black dog

had Mongolian ancestors,
who rode in the canoes
going south down the coast

away from the snow.
He waits for us at
the edge of the river
to cross when we die.

Taino Eclipse*

The moon is an amber heel in black waters
Or a tiny scull of light dissolving in the sacred cenotes
a perfect circle of light erased, darkly glowing –

a fungus enclosed by a gold ring –
among a flora of stars.

It is a dark forest of dreams
where parrots of distinctive plumage
are the shadow passing –
returning to turquoise water of the *cenotes*
where the frail scull† of the moon
is dissolving with a quetzal's cry.

Here a tread the color of an ember heel
tracking through black waters
in the well – here a smoke covered moon –

a moon that could be an amber heel
set down – requiring gold beads and rock crystal
to match inexplicable movements in the black sandpaper sky.

It is the winter solstice, another year
gone.

* Tainos were the first people encountered by Columbus on the Island La Hispaniola. They believed at night the waters around them reversed and became the sky.
† *Editor's note:* Unsure whether she meant "skull."

Chiquihuate

Down below the shinning sand
thirty thousand years ago
human feet imprinted
passing through
a corridor free of ice –

a ground abandoned
by the Glacial Maxim

DNA in sediment of
ancient humans – of
trees and plants –
rocks touched –
shaped by hands.

A casual bowl,
a measuring stick
shells smooth – pierced.
What were they
looking for in the
damp soil of deep shelter?
Had they stopped
by need or by decision
unable to cross snow –
the ice bound perimeters?

From the inside the entrance
light fans out illuminating
vast rubble of humans searching
for the future, unable to
phantom what would
survive – just as we cannot
believe the barren surroundings
that let them thrive.

We leave no bones
only ashes – no DNA
for newcomers
those after us
to discern what was

once a green paradise
become a pile of radio
active rocks. We gift
our planet unfathomable
to ancient cousins – one
day we may return
to caves and ice –
a new age after neurons
have wiped the earth
clean.

Beliefs

I
Hummingbird whistling at night warns of illness
passes in the dark. He turns to her
throat burning. The dream is restless –
visions of grinding stone –
laying the body to rest is what will come of it.

II
The afternoon invites her to sweep.
The earth floor is warm, she can do nothing else,
luck is swept out and will not return
leaving her with no riches at all.

III
The dog wants to return. The path is dusty
and there is no food. He wants to know where she is, so that when she hits the clay pot three times calling him “Come, here is your house, come here is your house, come here is your house,”

he will return the following day, or the next.

Or you can use a gourd.

Tenochtitlan 1947

The form eludes me –
a red breast in Mexican branches –
the shape of your waist –
a childhood of tears –
the voice of a dog.
A humming bird's wing –
huipiles yellow and green.
I wait, time passes.
The nude in black ink
moves away, becomes more
breasts, face, legs parted.
You hold me form and figure –
these green stalks bend.
The storm approaches.

Chants*

I
Because this is the summer of great happiness
Because my Chinese fortune cookie is always right
Because the doves laid three eggs
Because in my dreams I am the outhouse woman

Because the man at the window was like cold air on the back of my neck
Because all day we lived together
Because the White Sided Pacific Dolphin had a friend, the seal
Because the Manatee eats lettuce underwater and doesn't drown
Because the fog comes in on casters
Because you are the old silver fox.

I am the jingling woman
I am the woman of the house
I am the dove woman
I am the woman of hammered tin
I am the Mexican woman
I am the woman of the dancing tongues
I am the half-say woman word woman.

II
Because I am a woman who has traveled
Because I travel again
Because I know when the earth under my feet is wet
Because I remember the smell of wet wood burning
Because I have seen the smoke curl in the morning mountains
Because I have lived on both sides of the mountain
Because I have woken between white sheets
Because I have spoken your language
Because my words belong to different kinds of dark

I am the solitary woman
I am the woman of rains
I am the woman of blue smoke
I am the woman of mountain paths
I am the woman of white linen
I am the woman of broken words
Dark word woman.

III
Because I woke up early
Because the shadows of morning are white
Because you are in the room
Because my house smells of Jasmine
Because the shadows are cool before the traffic begins
Because the kitchen smells of sweet coffee
Because I remember the taste of honey rolls in the garden
Because there are moments I pause to whistle to the hummingbird
Because my legs don't hesitate two stairs at a time

I am the sun woman
I am the woman of the morning
I am the woman who breathes
I am the woman who dances
I am the woman who savors
I am the woman who sings in her sleep
I am the whistling woman
I am the woman who visits you
Hummingbird woman.

*These chants were inspired by the chants of Maria Sabina, a visionary and a shaman, who lives in the mountains of Oaxaca.

Huichol Spring

I carve the sacred mark
send my Jackrabbit Spirit to the desert
where I whisper “Tatawari” to the wind
caught in the throat of a burning bush
find the rock where I was the first Madonna,

my face tattooed yellow and blue
black braids tied in bright yearns
and cross legged sit with visions of Brother Deer
lying with his two soft sisters
near the path cracked like blood.
Each year I try to heal my wound
waiting for the return of the pilgrims
from that dry land where the sky gathers
birds in its pockets and the cactus speaks
and they come back to me
for a few black beans.

To the Eighty Thousand

The leaves are green fish
splashing above me fresh on the trees
as this dust of eighty thousand mule
bones settles between my toes, clogs my nose
spices my brain with power of long forgotten
beasts – eighty thousand of them that heaved their loads
of silver ore out of the prudendial mountain clefts
more mules than people praying
kneeling shadowed in dim churches
these Guadalupanos pleading to their goddess
beneath the elbows and knees of the Sierra Morena.
Cactus grows in the cement
Staring at me with purple thorns.

Caves of Gibraltar

Wide as a gash in the flesh, lava
flows from the innards of earth
reminding us of our evolution –
of the earth before us
where other humans existed
in the caves of Gibraltar.

Their fingers, the same as ours,
carved rock, made tools and spears.
Fifty-five thousand years ago they
inhabited these caves fleeing the
arrival of our ancestors, a last hold out
in a world becoming foreign to them
after three hundred thousand years.

I watch the boat loads arrive from Africa
on the evening news – more arrivals
escaping the ruins of towns invaded
by those to whom we gave license
those whom we called, “father” “mother”
“grandfather”.

The heat of streaming lava pushes us
out of our homes, our streets, our
beaches. I watch new arrivals from Africa
And Haiti – boats full of humans
whom we will return to the rising waters,
the sinking earth.

On the Dig

Lost in the mountains
among the monolithic and abandoned stones
I try uncovering the dead
who under white crosses
are deaf to me.

In the dust of Texcoco I sift through remains
while the city grows to ten million
try walking backwards…
…frozen in childhood.

I gain a severed arm in formaldehyde,
a bronze equestrian statue
and what is left of the shaman
a dried hummingbird purchased in the market
among herbs and deers' eyes.

This mosaic fits you to the wall
a mural in small sections:
see the red Oldsmobile c.a. 1948,
the ceramic plate of "*pan dulce,*" a great aunt,
a hand under the white table cloth.

Crawling in the cathedral
pain was relief following me
like the eyes of Black Saint Anthony.

Iztaccihuatl

They saw her from a distance
freezing – a sleeping woman – a mirage
among those Spaniards wandering

in her shadow – all white
she was – where the ice slides –
a mirage of a floating island.
alone where ice slides easily.

Dawn blush across the valley of flower markets.
It is as though a death has come to pass –
in the distance the volcano Iztaccihuatl
appears far from the waters of Xochimilco's
ajolotes – dark days far from Iztaccihuatl
far from the dawn flush across the valley
of flowers – stalls – flowers a valley –
she above them – her dawn blush – across the valley
freezing alone – where ice slides easily.

Incest a cruel ax – cuts the cord
of union – of loving union – of loving –
then to flight – even as in her shadow
in the valley of sorrow – pain lingers
leaving the dry lake where
skyscrapers began to grow.

Has an awakening – a dawn so profound
ever been so destroyed?
What surprises then – weeping years lost
wandering on freeways?
Dark days far from Iztaccihuatl
from her dawn blush across the valley
of flower markets – freezing.

Her shadow of sorrows lingers
all the while – what they saw
was a sleeping woman–
a floating island, a lake at her feet

in her shadow – Texcoco

Would it have been easier living
among the mythical islands –
the volcano more like a carved
shell – hollow – lit inside – baroque
shadow – hidden oracle
resting, quiet, undisturbed –
to caress her Talavera surfaces?

The humming bird and the flower
the flower cleaves to the humming bird
freezing Iztaccihuatl – hidden –
untouched – a virgin fleeing

the years lost? Etched, carved –
a flame under snow
white unstained,

He waited.

Iztaccíhuatl

La vieron a la distancia
congelada – mujer dormida – un espejismo
entre esos españoles errantes
en su sombra – toda blanca
era – donde el hielo se desliza –
un espejismo de isla flotante.
sola donde el hielo se desliza fácilmente.

El arrebol atraviesa el mercado de flores en el valle.

Es como si la muerte estuviera de paso –
a la distancia el volcán Iztaccíhuatl
parece lejano a las aguas de Xochimilco
Axolotes – días oscuros lejos del Iztaccíhuatl
lejos del arrebol que atraviesa el valle
de flores… establos… aflora un valle
ella está por encima de ellos –
su arrebol – a través del valle congelada sola
donde el hielo se desliza fácilmente

El incesto es un hacha cruel – corta el lazo
de la unión – de la unión amorosa – de amar –
y huir después – y aún en su sombra
en el valle de los lamentos – el dolor
permanece dejando un lago seco
donde comienza el crecimiento de los rascacielos

¿Ha visto un despertar – un amanecer tan profundo
tal destrucción?
¿Por qué entonces nos sorprenden –
años perdidos llorando, recorriendo carreteras?
Días oscuros lejos del Iztaccíhuatl
de su arrebol atravesando el valle
de los mercados de flores – congelada.

Su sombra de desdichas permanece
todavía – lo que ellos vieron
era una mujer dormida –
una isla flotante, un lago a sus pies
en su sombra… Texcoco.

¿Hubiera sido más fácil viviendo
en las islas míticas
el volcán más bien concha

tallada – hueca – iluminada por dentro – sombra
barroca – oráculo oculto
descansando, en silencio, en calma –
acariciar sus superficies de talavera?

El colibrí y la flor
la flor se adhiere al colibrí
Iztaccíhuatl congelado – escondido –
intacto – ¿una virgen huyendo de

los años perdidos? grabada, tallada –
una flama debajo de la nieve
blanco y puro.
Él espera.

Otomi Migration

The raw sky bleeds
red blood of sorrow
filling the cistern* where
we can see – as they did the movements
of the reversed, inside out, upside-down monuments
the Otomi built around them – pyramids, temples
secret passages they came so far to find.
Walking together as a long serpent might cross a plain
leaving seeds and waste – the women holding
the newborn and the dying, they came eating toads and snakes, and
sometimes each other, to find this reflection of unknowable forces – to
watch the turning of the universe that they called
Spirit and Soul.

How were they to know the emptiness of that space – those wanderers of
the incomplete sphere – the unknown jungles and mountains yet to be
crossed? They came to sing, to dance the spirits, to cage the birds,
capture the monkeys and to hunt the deer
more swift than lightning.

I come to rest and watch the canyon wrens
gather winter seed.

*The first Meso-Americans built cisterns at the foot of their temples in order to watch the nocturnal movements reflected there.

Teotihuacan de Mi Padre

Counted in decades
when my father of watches first
took me *la cueva,* to those old rocks
tumbled and pierced, that sheltered the first ones
to arrive in the *laguna* among the scaled
peaks sheered by lightening – humbled,
bedraggled to change the mud in Teotihuacan,
before us – we who came to touch
ruins of thousands of years, to breathe
and dance and sing their bright song.
Cracked, rough and red with age – a ceramic bowl
from the valley pierced by rocks counted
in millennia – it was the *valle* of Teotihuacan
that was our home – though it had held others
who left us their traces – *Teo-ti-hua-can* for a daughter
who succeeded him.

Padre de Ojos Negros

Padre, eres pequeño
de ojos negros
las manos con uñas claras
como lunas llenas
eres de tres tias
que llevan velos y van de negro.

Padre, en esta noche de
despedida
he visto en tu sombra
un niño pequeño y perdido
que va llorando
buscando ojos negrosv sobre este avión vacio.

Battle of Tenochtitlan

after a painting by José Clemente Orozco

Gone now – his back legs cut off
below his hips – the masked warrior
tucks the small body between his
legs, meaning to bury him in the
piled up earth – his mask a shield
as the warring men with red bodies
in the sludge of Texcoco move slicing legs, arms,
feet leaving corpses stuck – next
to the lake, on one of those sunny days
the battle surging, a child wandered

into the relentless encounter
then suddenly… dead.

Cuitzeo

The road she steers on wraps black ribbons around the mountain.
It edges towards the straw and earth village below.
Flat water seams the sky with a gray scar.
Between Salamanca and Cuitzeo she once saw crimson flamingos pull bright
fish from mirrors of green.

She looks for them every time –
red “S”s linked as far as the eye could see
standing on what seemed like forests of orange legs
crowding to celebrate the new day.

Or did she imagine them, flaming ghosts of the past
inhabiting this ghost lake, shriveled, rumpled
bed of mud, aged beyond recognition
by the mega trucks speeding past?

Teotihuacan

I.
I followed the river
bloated with mud
breathing in small rushes
having traveled for centuries

without stopping squeezed
by rock walls – searching
for what? A place to rest perhaps?

II.
Old rocks tumbled, turned by early
hands, the first ones in Teotihuacan
– ours too – in glass cases
traces, what belonged to others left, carved in
green stone – bowing men, women offering plates
clay figures in glass cases.

III.
Forgotten in the frenzy
the bloom quickly falls
under speeding rubber –
The face in the sand – a
puzzle in rock – a walk
among the magueys ignoring
their thorns – embroidered
petals in the above
branches – the gusts hold
me, torn between spring
and snow. Here no frozen ground,
I walk under this heaven – ancient
blood moving through my heart.

Teotihuacán

I
Seguí el río

henchido de lodo
respiraba en pequeñas erupciones
luego de viajar durante siglos
sin cesar, apretujada
por muros de roca – buscando
¿qué cosa? ¿Un lugar para descansar, quizás?

II
Viejas rocas cayeron, volcadas por manos
tempranas, las primeras en Teotihuacán
– nuestras también – en cajas de vidrio
rastro que perteneció a otros y dejaron tallado
en piedra verde – hombres
en reverencia, mujeres ofreciendo platos
figuras de barro en vitrinas.

III
Olvidada en el frenesí
la flor cae rápidamente
bajo el tope de velocidad –
la cara en la arena, un rompecabezas
de roca – un paseo
entre magueyes ignorando
las espinas – pétalos
bordados en las ramas
superiores – las ráfagas me sostienen
dividida entre primavera y nieve.
Aquí no hay suelo congelado,
camino bajo este cielo – antigua
sangre moviendose a través de mi corazón.

Traducción: Iván Soto Camba

Being Dead

This room is gray with gurneys
closely parked. I've come to say
good-bye. He is weak now,
cannot easily walk. He leans
heavily on me. There is only this
moment in this room – at the end
of a life he leans sweetly to
the almost rest of long bones.
We make our way among
one after the next – gurneys still now
they line the wall – barely notice
'till here a high narrow
metal structure. This is all I can do.
We stand together – dead.

Portrait

for George

The drawing you made
all black lines capture you
sitting cross legged one hand
holding your left leg the
right hand in you're mouth.
Is it a cigarette you're gripping?
The white paper brushed
to gray behind you is too small
to hold your body your eyes two

dots stop your brush at the top.
Firmly placed they study the
scene before you – what exactly
were you staring at? All arms
and legs crossed, one line
slighting your body thins
the blubber your sweat
shirt covers – only reaches an
elbow, but it's the eyes I come
back to peering into the drawing
barely there, yet they hold me –
Straight out meet mine above
the lumbering body sitting
on the floor.

Piña 1525

Pineapples slow to arrive
in the hull of the galleon pointing east
all sails wrapped, tied, to unkeep the wind
this prize from the new lands.

Will it hold?

The king's table waits
for the nectar more yellow than flame
while its fruits decay,
moldering juices will
burn one's throat a, gift
betrayed by time –

a gift from the midnight
waves that lap the Basque
shores not yet unfooled
by India – so much
still unknown.

Best we leave it thus,
the shore, the waves
the pineapple much too
over ripe, too rotten
to taste.

The Dog Inside Me

encroaches night after night
another day of the growing few –
a feral awakening crouches
on black rock, an icy dilemma.
What has it been? Chemistry
of ages crafts the hair of mongrels –
we are born out of elements
gyrating forever, files of chance
ordering, disordering particles
who knows from where.

What Happens

Words, *palabras,* vistas –

seeing, the red and black bird.
I am difficult to live with –
I am a replica of my mother.
My dog is blind – but it is hard
to live with me.
The voice was saying, “the
beginning is recognizing the fault.”
I want you to take care of me –
That is all I know of how love
happens between a man
and a woman. Pretense, trick
the other. Lie.
Fail.

Geology

Alone in the house there is little to direct her.
She is like an octopus of feeling
putting out tentacles, each a different
color, red, green, blue. She hopes to reach shore
before nightfall. The window is black.
Not even the outline of her cheekbone is visible.

Brown waters are below her, lumps of earth
turning under the surface.
And the glistening, flashing fish,
large enough to hold, like children,
are just breaking the edges of ripples,
catching, (the candle light, the starry reflections.)

Alone there are no bridges

she can cross to the other side. The *barranca*
below has been eaten away by thousands
of years of rushing rivers. Great mountains tumble forward wrenched,
slammed, narrow peaks
granite shelves of pain moving inward.

Wednesday P.M.

They waited for you to speak
and listened while trains
knocked you through Brazilian jungles
your daughter's face
the flower on your lapel.
You were more surprised
Than I expected –
Now I feel you slipping
back through sunlit Spanish
summers, as I watch you
receding down the hall
banging against my ribs.

Quiet

Quiet
the smell of flesh burning
quiet
smooth oak counter top
quiet

the brown waters underground
quiet
inside a refrigerator
Fifteen years of quiet
a muffled scream
of tissues tarring
quiet
a dead womb smell
quiet
you leaving
quiet…

Old Photos

Black and white: the photos
avoid color, instead etching
outlines, ladders as purple zippers
to climb, a hand here, a shoulder
there, lips SOS signals, legs
forever crossed stuck
in the old album.

None is the true picture –
but how do you capture pain
with the shutter of a camera?
The welts don't show on
the small face of the girl
no speech was recorded
no threats documented
people didn't talk about
the pain. No one asks

“did you have pain today?”
Here, a shutter unable
grovels deeper in the pit
of the stomach – nor does
her hair curl where it has
been pulled. She is black
and white in the photograph
no purple shows. She is holding
animals: a cat, a monkey, a
white and brown dog named Patches.
The black and white story
that begins before she was born –
ends with a shutter.

The New Country

As a child I pressed my hand into clay.
Small bones.
Gave it to my mother and father,
her shoes were always too big,
even at eighteen my toes wiggled.

Wore my father’s flannel shirts
rolled at the cuff
over boys blue jeans.
Fit myself to the man.

Getting the right measurements
I couldn’t miss no matter who I married,
I wore his grandmother’s wedding shoes
small white satin I kicked

off at the reception.
People pointed.

Now coats of different colors.
A woman says, “buy something red or yellow,
something younger.”
Still my head bobs
I am a puppet draped
Bones too small.
In this new country
nothing fits.

In the Garden

for John Sours

My hand on the Gate
pulls me up clinging
to this barrier
I see a young man in
Ford Coupe, he leans
on the steering wheel
laughing at me clinging
to this tin separation
wanting to be rescued
I am laughing here
in a garden where lilies cup
their gold, I am Eve among
the cacti, and maguey –
where do we go

from here? Could it
be a world
without end?

Papi

A man alone loosing his teeth
A man with a mustache
A man with black wavy hair
A man with “eagle eyes”
A man who worked and studied
A man who had a friend at the delicatessen
A man who loved baloney sandwiches and ham and cheese
A man who carried home jars of pickles and cold cuts
A man who played tennis at the British Reforma Club
A man who took a bath once a week
A man who took his daughters to church because their mother refused
A man who dusted the dining room table holding the cat singing “si pumpsi, si pumpsi”
A man who loved parties and dancing
A man who drove a 1919 DeSoto six days a week
A man who gave the policeman a bottle of tequila for Christmas
A man who had tailors make his suites
A man who drove his family to Acapulco and rescued the sister who floated away in an inter-tube
A man whose best friend was Bernie Roseback who gave me a letter from a famous writer
A man who loved San Jose Purua with the bubbling sulfur baths
A man whose sexual appetites
led to the worst crisis of his life

and changed him forever.

You Are an Old Man

You are an old man
frail under the white
sheet when the nurse
uncovers you I see
for the first time your
whole body the small
penis between your
legs – what does it mean
now after all these years
of denial – denial after
denial – liar they called me
but you knew
in that last bed that
you could simply say – Yes,
I did it, forgive me –
And then I wept, you laughed –
I go free.

Quake

I was twelve the year
the earth was torn
dogs howled warning
it came down the mountains

through the night and hung me
between window frame and floor
and the sound of glass breaking
and my mother's shouts
and the stairs walked away
and in the garden my father
in satin dressing gown feet bare
yelling, "Fran, come away from the house."

Mother

The one thing I am glad
of is no child calls me Mother –
a terrifying word to overcome
where others have gone and
glad of it – not me – nor do I
call "papa" or "papi" or "father" who
might have begot it.
I am sure of the walls
that hold me up
sure no bloody shard remains.
My own Mother always
said "she did it" meaning
my sister pushed the ladder.
White-wrist-welts result
to prove the razor was easier
the water hot – the bath
a bloody sarcophagus –

Blank spaces left in Mother's gray
matter – so my libretto –

also untrue – was it this, was it that –
Why did the story keep changing?
I never dared to hold
the bleeding cells in my uterus
I burned the basket – let the knives cut
them out – then gave up – altogether
– no more zygotes – never wanted them.
You're so young they said – out
I repeated – my amnion done – never Mother.

Madre

Hay una cosa que me satisfase
no hay niño quien me diga Madre –
una palabra atorrizante para mi –
adonde otras han ido
con gusto – ¡yo no! – ni
llamo – papa – o – papi – o – padre
a quien lo haya concebido.
Estoy segura de los muros
que me sostienen – que no quedan
pedazos de cristales sangrientos.
Mi propia Madre siempre
decía "ella lo hizo" indicando
que mi hermana habia empujado la escalera.
Cicatrices- blancos en sus puños para comprobar
la navaja de rasurar era mas fácil –
la agua caliente – la tina –
un sarcófago sangriento –

Espacios vacíos dejaron en

la materia gris de mi madre – así mi libreto
también era mentira –
porque el cuento siempre
cambiaba – ¿fue asi, o fue asa? –
¿por que siempre cambiaba el cuento?
Yo jamás atrevi dejar las cedulas
ensangrientadas que se multiplicaran
en mi útero – quemé la canasta – deje
que los cuchillos la cortaran –
y luego desespere – totalmente
– ya no habra mas zigotos – jamás los quería.
– Pero eres tan joven – me decían – fuera
repetía – me amnion terminó – nunca madre.

Mexico City Leaving

A plane parked
beyond the tunnel
I must pass through
alone – locked out are faces
I love, people who
touched me in slumber.
Doors seal the separation –
men in uniform have
stamped my pamphlet.
Hades waits.

La Lluvia de Noche

La lluvia cae
Y desaparece hojeando los arboles
Tentando el piel de sus ramas
Escondiendo entre las piedras
Húmedas de su caricia – volando
Por la noche que es suya
Tocando flores como si fueran
Teclas de un instrumento hueco
vacío – en las tinieblas – solo
compone su canción, solo
en la negra noche –
rumores de agua
cayendo.

La Luna

La Luna

En el suelo
una olla y

un pedazo
de luna

con el tiempo
se disuelve una

Mi Vida

El milagro de mi vida es la vida
que surge de manera quieta
de mañana a noche, que busca
un fondo preciso donde los recuerdos
de manos duras de insultos
de voces llenas de furia
aventadas contra la sangre que pulsa
en mis venas – descansen, siembran
pequeños milagros como semillas
de girasol, como las amaneceres
llenas de operas de calandrias.
El milagro de mi vida es que existo
que seguire existiendo hasta
las ultimas cenizas caigan
al suelo.

Pedro Paramo: ***Mumuros***

A raucous seriousness, the party
    sound emboldened
    dissolves
lyrical

a confusion of all things
    colliding in the night
joy sings its tickling soprano
    approaches and not scary

chords – widening melt
    (trees enter? *¿que pasa aqui?*)
a pleasure

of frightening warmth

what? stop & enter, run & stop echoes
¿entonce?
listen:
coming and going over and over
but not monotonous

how can that be
not overwhelming?
night noises – cease – resume
silence breaks
burbling its continuous
insistence

moves into organization,
additive, expansive adornments, adjectives?
multiplications?
footsteps in space not urgent

a somber relief, slow

the page
turns

the soothing held – a hymn interrupted
sweet and angry
resounds as though far-away cymbals
darkness encloses
too deep for thought, a forced acceptance
heartbeats like footsteps but not approaching
silencio
el rumor del silencio is suspense
is echo is not quite

shadows
    airy beyond and inside
hojas de arboles suspiraba   silence
    dissolves into desire

that night ends, then
        loneliness.

Del Camino XXXIII

¿Mi amor?
¿…Recuerdas, dime,
aquellos juncos tiernos,
lánguidos y amarillos
que hay en el cauce seco?…

¿Recuerdas la amapola
que calcinó el verano
la amapola marchita,
negro crespón del campo?…
¿Te acuerdas del sol yerto
y humilde, en la mañana,
que brilla y tiembla roto
sobre una fuente helada?…

– Antonio Machado

The Path XXXIII

My love?… Remember, tell me,
those tender rushes,
languid and yellow
that are in the dusty riverbed?…

Remember the poppy
charred by summer,
the dry poppy,
black netting in the field?…

Do you remember the sun,
stiff and humble in the morning,
that shines and trembles broken
on a frozen fountain?…

– Antonio Machado / Translation: Miriam de Uriarte

II
Being

Airport Mexico D.F.

A plane is parked
at the end of the tunnel.
Locked out are faces
people who touched me –
the door sealing separation.
They're saying something
over and over – lost
I move on, step forward.
Men in uniform have filled
the last page with black ink.
Night. Always the other
side of the moon.

Chiaroscuro

So maybe this is the way it is, coming over the bluff
and seeing the infinite colors of the wind above the
water that is gray and peaked, restless under the push
of the evening fog, the brightest nugget burning
clusters threadbare. I look over my shoulder to the
lavender belly of fog erasing the Bridge towers –
orange stuck to the grassy slopes in front of me – I

could be looking through gels, orange in this light,
the chiaroscuro patterns of the fading sun on the
Berkeley Hills.

You are stretched out the whole length of the bed
a red Oaxaca bloom pulled over those precise bones.

Beside me my dog trots. It is her spirit world we are
paying homage to – both of us in the outdoors
together. I let her set the pace. People whose faces are
passing. Listening to the kites make whistling sounds
– the gulls I am thinking about friends, about life
among them.

Flight

The plane leaps into the air –
From above spaces are quickly erased – black
holes we track across the unending heap
of lights, bright quilt covering the knees –
the toes, the spine of mountains, across
the valley we fly, all the way to the lump
of a toe – to where the spine of the
Great Lago de Texcoco begins, adorned
by a necklace of lights on jagged peaks
surrounding the jumble of tossed lights
compounded, stacked we wait to land.

Jetting North

From the sky, going north
razor peaks, tops like nipples
or clawed surfaces, shaved stubble
the froth of clouds mirroring the landscape below.
Then not moving – then transparent milk
white all around, slugs, mountains
dry hides of lizards or pencil point
sharpened shavings – then treads
then an ancient imprint – or gouged soles of cities
gnarled coat of a sheep –
cauliflower to fly through.

Settling In

The sun is white paint
Splattered everywhere along the fence
This wooden fence I never dreamed of
But am bound by. When I sleep
I compound dreams like dead ancestors
Bury each one under the floor
To grow roots to anchor me here.
Here the past returns to me
My grandfather comes to visit,
My mother sits up in bed her hair in curlers.
Friends give parties in rooms I do not know
Disarrange the furniture –
Yesterday an old lover came back
And I was sorry I hadn't married him
But he drank too much and lived in Belgium.

Morning

The holy seams of light inch around the door.
Outside the morning spreads from tree to lazy blue
tangle. Each shadow holds
the black knowledge of leaf, flower, branch,
flamboyant rose. Smooth as the lion's mouth
the echo of water splashing in the basin.
I am listening for the pomegranate's crack.

Ducha a Media Noche

He necesitado la caricia
de su tibia y delicada tentación
el mojado dedo que corre
por mi espalda
para saber cómo
es ser amada
cómo es recibir el dulce
calor de un abrazo
inesperado.

Appaloosa Spring

Prickle thorn
green breeze, manure
warm horse, hay odor of
belly sweat on white like

strawberry roan – mold speckled
silk –
swing up we go
into the ancient past, stalks
long legged, flaunting
nature's gold –
maize cobs beaded stones
this hoof, rocks this furrow,
horse ember ash
eye – human mouth hair
the bananaquit knows better
than to be… the river that flows
without splits – now springs
wet, yellow belly flashing
mud capped hooves move
centuries forward – ember ash
human cinders horse
under saddle centuries old
briefly – like the legs
of new born colt
from somewhere
…else

Wars of Encounter

The great head above the floating bodies
reaches for air that is disappearing
in the marshes of Texcoco.
A hoof above the spear of a bloated
dead unknown to him – who will be sacrificed –

slaughtered in the bloody waters – for what?
For naked men who slice each other's bones – cut
away feet – gurgle blood?
All that matches is the color of it – of the horse who
tasted the grasses of Spain, of the men who rode him –
of the men who met him.

Hawk Heaven Day

There they were, brown fluff on the fence posts,
backs to the wind, waiting…
more than you had ever seen before
down from the wet green sky, paleolithic sights.
Were they listening for the harmonic
convergence the black and white cows heard on
their cow heaps? Each bird was a story. The messages
kept flying in.

"Hawk!"
"Egret!"
"A Blue Heron!"

The sparse fields of soft green silence yearned.
Beside me you made me glad and the pit of my
stomach hollow as did the old prop
planes that dropped over air pockets and opened
that same pit – a hole the universe was passing
through.

Oriole

A black and orange bird clinging
to the window framework, a curious
bird, staring in at me, me staring
out at him. Where did he come from
with a coat so bright? An oriole. Where
do they concoct such a color? Interspersed
black streaks, wings that clasp
his body, head cocked
to see the unknown, the creature enclosed
Not in a tree, no options to fly,
to know the wilderness as his kind can
whose populations stand below him;
who left the sea so long ago.

Chachalaca

Chachalaca, not like the Scarlet Ibis
or the Spotted Tangager
or the Green Macaw.
Chichen like, cha-cha-
laca – a dance we did,
like a broken radiator
or train wreck – these gray
birds with turquise feathers
sing their own song
to dawn…

Pushing Through the air

Wren
pushing through the air –
feathers behind –
talons unfold looking for the leaf,
small joinings in the bright light
where her feet reach
for the knowing, the
alighting among green
blowing charisma
wings spread
beak open.

Field Guide

for Victor

Tanager – cars and trucks above
Warbler – stop to check spelling
Red Grosbeak – colored slate –
colored slate to you bearded man –
feathers of grosbeak yellow, black
and orange – old man – don't know
you blue breast seed eater, never
sparrow, rufus crowned, deliberately ruddy
man, automobiles, Guerrero to Oaxaca
dense underbrush, plate 23,
Queen Premium Egyptian
blue life, stalled autos,
traffic through the trees

Napa

It is quiet now.
The wind in the trees, the leaves like
green ostrich feathers waving.
With my feet on the desk I wait for
the image to wrap itself around the lines
braiding into the poem.
A black and white photo of my father and
me standing in front of that first house on Moliere,
his hands deep in his sport coat, me
in my tutu or the one arms entwined,
friends in front of the Napa River, taken
right after we all had swum in the bright beauty
of the glistening stones, all four of us,
holding each other, hair stuck to foreheads,
skulls suggesting what we didn't want to see.

Beginning Construction

The way light comes into a house
from above – and entering me
scales downward – my bed unmade
for days sometimes. When I walk beside you
I want to touch you, my face cold
on one side. When you leave I lie down on the floor
hoping it will hold me – my heels
leave tracks in the sand you say,
"Look how the wind blows the tops of the waves."
A long way out I see two sails like penguins moving

towards shore. I am afraid
to record even this, I am moving
through water hot and cold
a swimmer suspended.

Guanajuato A. M.

Slow the daylight
through the trees
wind pushing in
sounds of thrushes
slighting the green –
life resumes, no illness
here. My dog barks,
echos others up the hill
under Mexican trees.

Mer

MER as in ocean you say, as in the deep sound of
humming under water
as in whales sounding to find each other in the dark –
to know how far they have to go to where
the light, shut out, holds only the call
vibrating through the green and blue night – as the
call I hear from you under me
when the music surrounds us, where your face
has put on a white mask and I feel the humming

begin below your bone cage lay
my cheek against your smooth throat,
listen to the journey
we are taking
together.

Blooming

You are holding me.
I feel your arms tighten around me –
the breath in my mouth is a white flower
blooming – it opens and petals fall on you –
you are soft, I dip into you like a dark closet
full of my mother's old velvet gowns,
of shoes worn from walking
remembering the way your skin smells
when you come in out of the sun
the salt in your hair after running.

Bach Suite for Cellos

While the news tells us there is water on the moon,
cellos sing to us what it is like to be the inside of a tree,
and wish only that their soft wind resemble
echoing woods. If they could speak to us
more clearly they would tell us what we are leaving
behind – the fragrance of embers in stone hearths,
the sound of silver from a piano key, how

their roots explore what has passed for hell
in different languages – life without air –
what life will be like without you.

Dusk

for Victor

The window sheltered us
sitting in the dusk –
women young and old
children also, passing by,
many too young to remember –
two old people holding hands
in the window sharing the
fading light, and a smile
perhaps.

Me

The tongue so wanting to say
la yegua
ears soft architecture, an arch.
The brain has seeded recesses
that sprout unexpectedly – *el cielo*
Bending the mind in its reflection
Espejo – choosing the *palabra*
Between dog and *el perro*

Between blue sky and *el cielo azul*
Between *aqui* and beyond.

Being Old

I never knew what being old
meant until I had to leave the
ashes of friends behind –
until my knees were no
longer knees but sticks
to hold me upright.

Do you believe that
dogs take us across
the river? he asked.
He was worn and wrinkled
but still he knew the old
ways. Yes, I answered
I believe they carry our
souls over the water.

My old dog smiled
meaning she knew
the way.

The Last Pachyderms

Pachyderms are stomping through my house.
They took a wrong turn at San Juan

Tecopan while heading for Ajusco
and are now helping themselves to peanuts
I keep on the back shelf. Gray arches, so huge I walk
under them on the way to the telephone
which is what elephant means in Greek – huge arch.
The dog is puzzled. Evolution has left her
with an entirely different set of protrusions.
These jumbos carry a hand on the end of their nose.
They use it to dig for salt
and greet each other clamping trunks after long
separations. There is a baby pachyderm among them.
She is standing on the coffee table reaching for her
mother's gray tits like rubber plugs. These
descendants of mammoths,
were once thought to be manatees that climbed trees.
They are hiding in my *sala*.

They are the last elephants on earth.

Weaving

for Madge

My nails grow to help me thread
the bright sways
of morning's light
that bind me – weaving
strong threads
by hand as they fall
nearer the eye of the needle.

On the sands that hold you
forever after your death –
like the weight of an unwanted
lover – you who wove as did Penelope
the dark shadows that lingered
so too will your nails lengthen.

But you will still be dreaming
when I reach that grave of sand.
How to know why they stopped
those threads, that wove the weft
and warp making Chinese stitches
ever entwined on an ancient bole?

Always you were that close, woven
into my small self waiting for the next
star threading Italian lakes while we
laze on the ancient shore.

Pandemic

In spite of his age
the doctor wears
blue jeans rolled at the ankle
his face masked with a white
mouth cover. We converse
walking quickly down
the hall recalling events
now so far in the past.
We have both been vaccinated.
He grimaces when he says,

“They chose me for my age,
an ancient man, not because
I was attending the infirm.”
I try to show sympathy, but
so many are dying now.
I am glad his body is
beside me for these few
moments not down below.

October 25th

Soon someone else will have to take
over this day that has belonged to me
since my first breath, as I took it over
from Picasso who must have taken it
from someone else – a minotaur,
a harlequin perhaps, or a woman
with a contorted face all angles –
I will pass it on with best wishes
to another child – maybe Chinese
who will celebrate with noodles and rice
and write letters backwards – who
will speak a language I never imagined
when talking to her Chow Chow – who
will speak a universal tongue same as
my long and bony pooch.

Old Zihua

The white shadows zipping across the ceiling immediately recall Zihuatanejo salamanders, years ago, a place long forgotten, likely crumbling under rotting palmetto. But this place is not crumbling, it is a lively beach with humble structures, all tottering on the edge of a mangrove that moves inland to shelter turtles and alligators. Hand painted signs on blackboards or news paper remind us dinner time is coming and we better hurry up and choose among the few breezy, barefoot places before all the stools are taken. Offerings: guacamole with red onion, guacamole with white onion and cilantro, guacamole and quesadillas and perhaps a few shrimp; beer for happy hour. The dog sitting in the sand by the door looks just like Moza, and the one chasing waves that slide away from her pushing the breeze, also looks like Moza. Then there is the dog that approaches me on the dirt road who wags his tail and asks, “where is Moza?” who looks exactly like her… I think I forgot to bring her. Next time, I tell myself. She would like it here, so much like old Zihua: the guys on the beach playing kick ball between the topped over turquoise fishing boats; the little girl in underpants covered with sand making for the wave that plops her down. But what most reminds me of the untampered *playas* of long ago, is the lack of bright lights, the barely illuminated *palapas*, the quiet voices of people at sunset on the beach, and my simple room with salamanders darting where fans spin effortlessly and nothing but the long, white drape breaths – no TV, no cars, no street lights, or video cameras eyeing me, just me, in a white room on a white bed thinking

about what a joy Zihuatanejo used to be.

Birthday

Having reached eighty
there is now a before country
And an after country – a before time
And an after time – a before place
And an after place – a have place
And a had place – a seeing place
And a dark place – then a place
of sunshine and waiting.

Aging

Strange this aging, time slowed down, longing for quiet. What I keep noticing is that the objects around me are aging as well. My beautiful rugs from Oaxaca, and the Middle East are threadbare in places. The one in my study, from Afghanistan has a hole that Moza covers when she stretches out in the morning. Strangely, the visibility of wear and tear is comforting. When I come upon one, I often pause, wondering if it is serious enough to be replaced, then I move on comforted by the memories of where it came from, how it got here remembering the village woman I bargained with. Objects have come to mean a lot. The guitar that was given to me when I was

eight years old is tucked under my oak table from Mission Street. The table is stripped of the gray paint it came with, an Arts and Crafts seriousness about it. I still wonder if I should start taking music lessons. At eight, the strings cut my fingers. One of the most endearing objects is my father's tennis racket. It is propped on a chair in my bedroom. I look at it every day remembering the young man who loved to play, in his white shorts, and our mornings at the British tennis club, "Club Reforma" where the members celebrated the Queen's birthday. My father never told me why it meant so much to him, but in the long time since I retired, when the puzzling questions about the past absorbed me, I realized that it was related to his own childhood when my grandfather was working for British Petroleum in Mexico City. I still have trouble pronouncing "Theater" with the hard "th" of American pronunciation.

As I grow older I also realize how important stillness and privacy are to me. That may have to do with writing time, but I think it goes deeper, to the still mornings when I hung out the window smelling the fresh cut grass, looking west to Ajusco, a mountain that was one of many in the valley that belonged to the Aztecs. Juan Velorio on TV Friday night spoke about a well known Guanajuatense writer, Jorge Ibargüengoitia. I walk with Moza, past his memorial, in a park where ashes, recovered from the airline crash, are buried. Velorio said that his writing was something readers are drawn back to because of his humor and sarcasm which are typically Mexican. Is that because the humor that has passed though

unknown metaphysics of osmosis, from languages still
spoken here? There is a quirkiness about it.

Fig

Purple skin
rippling, ancient sweet leather –
born over and over again
round as a Roman coin whose tiny center puckers
inviting entrance – or suggests
the absence of an eye, an empty socket
of red seeds, then the green
mouth sorely severed
– bleeds white sap.

III
Later

Molcajete

Dusk – dogs answer motorcycles
on empty streets. Above my fence
the cypress is a dark bird
gathering birds.
A plane uncovers
the first star and I return
to those evenings
lying face up on the roof –
estrellas one by one
in the yellow Mexican
night – return to a single
light-bulb kitchen – dark women
moving arms-filling aproned waists
to the cri-cri of the clock
over the *molcajete* – *molcajete*
moving me home.

Stones as Hearts

No torches last night moving through the dark
no small pueblos suddenly
flaming to light on the mountain

side where people welcome
the fire of the new year –
just black, not even stars – under
the heated blanket I dreamed
of sexual union – of two becoming
one – a journey to the cosmos tender
and loving – triumphant and full of surrender,
a sacrifice of sorts – the extraction of a beating heart.
In the morning I find it on the butcher's shelf
behind glass already dead.

The Return

Once more – not the icy loneliness
on the north side of the mountain –
rather, these vermillion fly catchers
in the wrinkles of the fountain.
A welcome spray of bright feathers
dusty rose, not the cage,
but the recurring dream among
the finches in this green garden.

The Wrist Watch

The face is cracked – you wore
it to cover the three white scars
on each wrist, but still the gashes
showed. The straps are genuine lizard,

lizards who lost their lives
as you could have – deep wounds.
The hands stopped years
ago, eight fifty. Did you ever
wonder why I never returned,
never sent Mother's Day
greetings or birthday cards?
Why the hands paused –
then froze? A life
finally gone – no turning
back time.

Tres Marias

The mountains make a valley where she lives
And meets two men:
A priest dressed in black whom she calls father
And a man whose hands are as soft as the tan leather
Upholstery of the roadster he drives.
She divides her time between them – she avoids
choosing.
They both serve. At moments she is crazed by either.

In the roadster it is the speeding landscape.
Trees wave to her, the magueys crowd
the fields to pay homage, the wind whistles
praise in her ears. Where the mountains peak
the village of Tres Marias rises to greet her with a
bright blue refreshment stand. Here at
thirteen thousand feet Mad Queen Carlotta stopped.
This she gets from one.

At her kitchen door he stands with
the light behind him a delicate black shadow – his
neck banded by the stiff white collar
reminds her of small Inca doves on the telegraph wire.
He visits her on sunny afternoons when the windows
are open to the garden and her cries drift
over the dahlias and roses, across the careless
shrubs where the sparrow cocks his head
in the bird bath. She is one of the Marias lifted
thousands of feet. He touches her
everywhere, his flat narrow figure face down.
She looks at the way her legs fold into his, and how
her breast curves out, away from his resting head.

Family Tree

There are places we have been together
which I do not know
so many ways of telling each other things
sometimes by touching.
In the large halls you walk
in my mind a small warm figure
a possibility –

The curves a carpenter makes
he has learned from loving
the way a breast is smooth
the small of her back
all peaceful transformations –
a German carpenter wanted only this
for his son and now you

build with redwood
I will lie on.

The White Dog

Night tunnels down with barely a whisper.
I sit at the end of the day waiting for it to be over.
Next to me a glass of clear water shadows the wood
in such a way that it recalls a Diebenkorn print of
water, glass, shadow,
small stacks of paper strewn on the round table edge
with maybe a spade of hearts.

Today I sat with a woman who paints who draws
small beings blowing out of the rim
of a volcano, the same children
over and over again and I see
where this is a reference to the molten
underground where we are all connected
before we are separate and it is a reference
to Mexico, to the big primeval rims in Michoacan,
too huge to ever reach, that recede even as you walk
closer.

Her landscapes are pale or full.
The donkey is there that serves
as her stand in for the burdened history
of women born with belligerent sorrow
and mellifluous joy
the big eared horses made grinning she-asses.
The white dog is mine, the one with pink mange,

and a half closed eye
a puppy still, already starving, her bones like so many
railroad tracks
clicking down her spine, her one good amber eye
looking up hopefully, like I look up hopefully,
thinking you might be there.

The Earth Waits

So she looked and saw
there was no way I would
stay in the house
once it became a prison –
no way I would sit mumbling
at the window – no way
I would let the chaos
overcome me – my body
belonging to others, do this
do that even their good
intentions would rankle me
me sitting by the window
that was no longer mine –
better to let the whole
thing go – collapse, re-find
the cells it belonged to
conceding one cell
at a time until they
were earth again
and I was gone.

Long Bones

Huddled, long white bones
a dusty resting place
forgotten even by the
passing visitor, her cup
at her feet. Did she walk
through new ground
never before broken –
unknown the weeds that
hid from the sprouting wind
leaving new seeds in raw places?
Did she lean, as she is leaning
now, against the stones of a mountain,
a mountain home perhaps or was she
napping, hoping a hand would wake
her from her heavy sleep –
forgotten before the rain comes
yet again to these untouched
acres – as I will forget her again
today when I bus home?

Sea Bass

You are long gone.
I order *robalo* – your favorite
at the KASH-BA sip wine –
different generations – you
would have preferred beer –
gold sliding bitterly into the glass.

The belly dancer steadies
a sword her muscles contracting
then relaxing – like the jiggling fish:
I struggled –
trying to get away.
The last course
a cold muffin.

Aladino

The horse blown up on the turnpike
is not my horse.
Brown gelding moves
between cornstalks
the sloping neck
on either side of leather
smooth and warm –
curving rump goes out
from under one side –
then the other.
The pirul tree hangs lace on withers
moves to mamey-colored background.
– Dirt road settles in dust
after hooves – passed the hacienda
chickens – who fly from
cantering feet. Ears forward
head watching, head holding
the horizon –

The Red Mare

All morning with the mare,
red among the ant hills,
between pirules and mesquite,
the spoiled river next to us,
the whining urgent –
between my thighs, from shadow
to sun to leafy shadow,
cool breeze, hot sun, the narrow
milpas ready to sprout,
so we made way among the *nopales*
waiting for rain, the *magueyes* supplicating –
re-conquering, with new eyes claiming
the yellow turtle backs in the distance – this is mine,
and this, mine for all of my brief eternity,
one foot print in a millennia,
watching the hoof marks over the burro's tread, over
disappearing deer track, the singing clip-clop,
the smell of the red mare –
the surprise of the vermilion flycatcher…

IV
Dreaming

I. The Gate

A click. There is something missing, gone. I have left something on the other side. The loud speaker is saying, “Flight number 646 to Boston now departing gate 15.” The loudspeaker is vibrating, it is echoing, bouncing many voices now. The ceiling is vaulted and empty. The voice says, “nothing will ever be the same.” This is the end of something I long to complete, to live out like the life of a wave, but this is the end. I am alone. The door has sealed the separation. Locked out the faces I love, the people who touch me, talk to me, walk in my dreams. The child sitting in the first row of the waiting room is crying. There are no vendors with pink spun sugar here, no men with clouds of colored balloons. His sister fidgets on three suitcases, two gray, one brown, one of the flounces of her dress hanging. The faces on the other side of the glass are saying something, they are mouthing the words, moving their lips, making “A’s” and “O’s” over and over again but I can’t make them out. The door is closed. The men are in uniform. They have put the seal in my book. They are part of the door. Daylight and warmth are on the other side. It is always night here, always the dark side of the moon, always the plane at the end of a tunnel, across the black asphalt. I am alone now with thenight, the stars and the black heavens. There is no returning to my bed where I leisurely pushed the blankets back this morning. That too is gone. These high heels, this new hat are as alien as armor. There is no going back, though I’ll try, I’ll try over and over again for the rest of my life. I’ll keep going through gates, listening for the click, watching the guard stamp over and over again who I am and

where I've been without ever knowing, trying to make out the secret message, the meaning in the purple ink. I'll look back a thousand times trying to find those faces that knock at my dreams, and I'll long to pull the covers over my head for just one more hour of sleep.

II. The Journey

A man and a woman have begun a trip together. They are searching. A man and a woman are traveling. They are looking out strange windows at scenes they don't remember. On the plane they look out small oval frames with white matted borders: a marriage portrait. She remembers as a child standing in the middle of her room, closing her eyes and feeling her way to the other side of the world, through that black earth, all the way to China where the people were standing upside down.

"How do Chinamen hold on mommy? Don't they fall off?"

The plane has landed. They are on an island on the other side of the world. They are standing on their heads, searching. The world is a kiwi fruit sliced in half and she is standing on the center most seed, surrounded by green. The sea is that color. She sees landscapes which remind her of Rousseau, painted scenes of jagged country side with chiaroscuro shadows moving across the valleys and green hillsides; tufted trees with neatly spaced legume pods and carefully arranged leaflets. She sees flowers delicate and subtle as lilacs, pale pink and cream colored. She can hear people eating leaves as big as elephant ears, and coconuts, and the soft white flesh of fish. She sips the juice of a coconut.

The man and the woman are looking in windows at a man and a woman sitting at a table lit with red lights. The woman is wearing a purple veil. They are passing green glass objects between them. They are sleeping in

rooms heaped with diamonds. He and she are saying things in their sleep, they are walking in and out of each other's dreams. She is saying, "Do you care for me desperately, passionately, always, even in exhaustion, chaos, and confusion? Is there a salvation? A paradise? A reward? Are you going to love me always?" He is smitten, he is saying, "Yes, yes always, even in the middle of the night after a long flight home. Even in Boston."

In Boston an old Jewish rabbi is entering a room furnished with American scroll chairs made in Baltimore in 1830. Pleased he stops to listen to a classical tune in this cavernous factory.

She is underwater struggling to wake: coming up from a dive the blurred light just above, the yellow and blue and white luxury of the water swirling, the last moment before breaking the surface, light refracted a thousand times. She is among the swaying waves, sand dashing against her legs.

All of life is green and bright and beautiful above, every palm tree a clear frond, there a delineated piece of sepia mountain side, the rocks flat, tilted, vertical, like edges of flat paper torn and reassembled in wet, black ink between verdant peaks. The steep hills are cliffs to the deep blue, sky. Water is so full of life. Life edges in from the shore: mangroves lifting bone-toed roots are stepping into the water. Life is edging out of the water.

Coral reefs press to the shores in layers, stacked wafers, delicate colors glowing in the light between burnished shelves. Soft spun beaches are hard to leave. She wants to stay here forever. In the sand she sinks down, cold then hot, loving the crunch of the sand sliding to outline the contours of her fingers, elbows, breasts, thighs; sealing her skin like a kiln seals wet clay. It is hard to come back after life in the sand. When she looks at the sea at dusk she thinks of a piece of purple linoleum flat and shiny she can slip under, like picking up a floor covering and sliding

under it, dropping into a world of bushes frozen in ice storms and fishes in trees.

He and she are moving together. They are sitting on a bus with no windows. The wind blows their hair. They see an old ox with curving horns and white folded skin moving across the rusty track led by a man. They see a woman dressed in silks and veils.

It is dark in this hotel room. Far away they are curled up in their single shell. She can hear him breathing beside her.

III. The Sphinx

Mostly it was the light, the way the light slanted in through the tall narrow windows between herself and the doors on the other side of the room. It seemed to fill the room with a tentative glow, as though a small, cold light bulb were projecting its light into the room from the other side of the glass panes. The light was, she imagined, like the light in an icebox when the door is opened: pale, uncertain, traveling over frozen objects buried in ice. She knew on the other side of the windows the ash trees were thin, almost bare. If she turned her head slightly she would see a few skinny branches leaning into the window ledge, a brown leaf dangling from one tip. Perhaps the autumn sun traveling through those branches had been strained, clarified, distilled to this cool chill that filled the room. Her shoe rested on the doorsill, a raised piece of stripping at the entrance of every seventeenth century room to keep the drafts out. She did not look down to check. She knew by touch.

The room was large, empty and the wooden floor sighed as she stepped on it. Directly in front of her were two doors. Fifteen paces would carry her to them. The light from the window on her right was from a sun

sliding away from the Earth further bleaching the faded blue rococo decoration on the ceiling. The painted motifs of griffon and shells ran evenly and symmetrically above the pale blue stripes that marked the beginning of the ceiling. Next to the doors was a fireplace she calculated to be taller than she was. Everything, walls, door knobs, window frame, the ledge below it, the dull parquet floor, everything was covered with a fine powdery dust. The room was chilly. Aside from the door she was standing in and the one directly across the room there was no other way in or out. She had planned to walk through the room without stopping. Now she found she hesitated to enter, but stood on the threshold feeling the chill of the diluted sun, studying the pale gray light that seemed to reflect back off the walls. She could feel no one had been in this room for a very long time. Her hand on the brass knob felt the fine dust under her fingertips. The room was waiting.

The stone fireplace, with its marble mantel and claw- foot embellishment was in keeping with the colors of the walls. The worn paper hung in several corners. It was screened with alternate stripes of pale blue and gray, outlined in thin, tarnished gold lines. Her gaze came to rest instead on the mirror above the mantel. The glass was fogged over with a dull hue, and it seemed to stare like a blind eye into the soul of the room, collecting the drift of the dust on the weak rays of sun without returning them, absorbing them, changing them to muted shades of gray-blue: clouds after rain streaked out of focus. Parts of the glass were tarnished by the decomposing silver behind it, so that small bubbles stained the surface with metallic mold. Movement of dust was so slight as to be almost imperceptible. It was a dull eye. She stepped fully into the room breathing the fine dust in deeper breaths. The chill of the room made individual odors difficult to separate. There was an odor of mildewed cardboard and old glue. Perhaps as she approached the fireplace there was also the smell of long extinguished fires. She could not be sure.

The eye, or mirror, seemed blind to her because she knew the blind

looked inward, to a different landscape, a different perception of events. The mirror seemed to be dreaming the room. It seemed to be dreaming a room, a room of different dimensions. As she approached she watched the different angles of the room shift slowly in and out of focus. She could not see her own small head or shoulders come into view, as the lower edge of the mirror was above the top of her brown hair. The room continued to shine blue and gray and gold, slightly out of focus, with the even, white painted garlands running above the wall paper, on the soft curving plaster that rose towards the center of the ceiling. When she stopped, she was directly in front of the mirror, searching the silver pickings to discern the patterns of light on the high wall behind her. High on that wall a white carved head of a woman looked back. The mirror seemed to want to hide the shape, for she could not see it clearly it was so far behind her and the pale light fell below where the garlands met, crescendoed into a crest and lifted what she could now see was a full figure reclined. The figure resembled the griffons painted among the garlands and leaves on the edge of the ceiling, but the lines of the haunches, the curve of the claws, the balance of the tail were not so angular. They were the softer contours of a lion shape sprouting heavy, feathered wings. She saw that the whole creature was pushed up on its forepaws to a partially sitting position. Altogether it bore the head and profile of a woman on whose chest were smooth pointed breasts, the breasts of a young, succulent virgin. Suddenly she longed to lower her fingers to the crevasses of her own body, she longed to feel the hot, warm moisture between her legs. The small sphinx looked directly ahead through the rocky silver texture of the molding mirror, and it seemed as though she was seeing a cave that moved back into the scull of time, to a womb, a passage way coming to life through the broken silver surface behind the glass. Then the dark erased areas that she was rubbing released something and she sunk to the floor.

She was the small sphinx. Delicate, straight nose, the deep set eyes, the small mouth and perfect chin. The power and muscle of her body rolled,

her breasts unprotected. Then the question came out of the dark, “Who will rescue me now that you are gone? Who will love me with undiminished passion, unfaltering hope? Who will take over my destiny, give me form and meaning, but you? Who will cure me, take responsibility for this weight, this black that makes me blind except to the deep feeling of misery, pain and unhappiness? Who will sanctify me, make me feel like a perfect, clean and beautiful Madonna?” If I loved the world before I met you, I love it twice as much now – the green trees, the lawns, the meadows where we walk until dawn.

IV. Home For Young Unwanted Boys

The home for young unwanted boys was down a long, narrow street on the east end of New York City, near Sheepshead Bay, where it sheltered the children from the snow and sleet in an old clapboard home that had lost its shutters, and whose wooden steps to the oak door were split in several places. In the rear lot, which had once been a garden, a newer concrete structure rose several stories, with an orderly arrangement of classrooms inside, next to the Jesuit brothers’ church, a respectable place of worship for the carpenters, tailors and longshore men who lived in the neighborhood with their wives and children. Up the block a bit, was a business building of many stories, a proud example predating the sky scrapers to come that were to distinguish the island city in the new Twentieth Century. Here men in suites and tailored jackets arrived each morning, parading up the subway’s steps, pulling their bowler hats and wool scarves around them, keeping the bay blasts from the making their eyes water and their noses turn red. That business building faced the world, distinguishing itself by offering the only clock whose huge face evenly, steadily, marked the hours, day and night. At night, the stately face of the clock lit up, and precisely signaled, hour by hour the exact

time in the otherwise darkened neighborhood, flashing with electrical precision, a number of times until the hour was struck. It was the first, and only clock in all of New York City that did, for in 1919 electricity was brand new.

Memo, my father, had been living with a family, the same family with whom he had traveled from Veracruz, Mexico, to New York City. He was fourteen, a slender boy whose thick black hair was combed back, behind his ears, a handsome lad, though his small, delicate bones told of different beginnings than the others he met on board the steamer that traveled between Veracruz and the New York harbor. There the fascinated sailors had tossed him coins to hear this native boy speak in fluent English. The surprising literacy that showed a preparation beyond his fourteen years also surprised the brothers at the Jesuit school when he was registered after his long trip by sea from Mexico.

In 1919 there was a war happening in Mexico, referred to in the New York Times as the “Mexican Revolution,” led by Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa (whom we later discovered was not the real Pancho Villa, but a Bandido who had taken the name of his assassinated leader). Everything was confusing in those days, Mexican trains didn’t run on time, or were blown up, telegraph wires were cut and used to hang priests, the U.S. Ambassador had put a drunken General named Huerta in the president’s office after the elected head of state, Francisco Madero, was shot in the back, and Rosa King, the British ex-pat, who had invested her inheritance in remodeling a palacio as a hotel on the main square in Cuernavaca, had to flee over the Ajusco mountain where she was maimed, loosing all her silver and silk belongings besides.

Younger generations were affected as well. Schools opened one day, then closed the next. School children played in the street as there was nothing else to do. Memo was one of those children who, with his classmates, had been abruptly dismissed from the American School as rumors spread that

the rebels were marching up Avenida Insurgentes. A large, shaded park was in the center of Colonia Roma, a few blocks from the American School. My father's family lived near by. In 1919 however, the school was attended by Mexican and American children whose parents worked for newly arrived international industries in La Capital. My grandfather had come from Puebla, first to study at the *Real y Pontificia Universidad de México,* created by Charles V in 1557, then, began a career, accepting an accounting position with the British, who had appeared at the end of the Nineteenth Century to assist the country's prosperous families by installing railroads, electricity, telephones and sending engineers underground to dig for gold, silver, and especially, barrels of oil newly in demand. It was the British Petroleum Company, Aguila Negra, that had quickly usurped the oil industry. Bernardo de Uriarte spoke English, as after the defeat of the French forces in 1865, in Puebla, Doña Francisca, my great grandmother, had declared, "from now on this family will speak English, not French!" So my grandfather had attended English classes in Puebla, and my father was sent to the American School near the park, beginning kindergarten in 1911 in la Capital, after the family had settled in Colonia Roma.

On the day in 1919 that my grandfather came home early for the midday meal he found Memo in the park with his young friends gathered around the fountain throwing stones across the water and aiming sticks at one another, making strategic moves to avoid being soaked by the "enemy". My grandfather abruptly called the game to a halt asking what they were up to. "We are playing Pancho Villa", my father yelled, "I am Villa, and those are Obregon's troops!" The boys gathered around the older man who was not amused. "We plan to join Villa's troops as soon as they arrive in la Capital!" Memo added. The boys cheered.

"You will do no such thing. You should be home studying. Why aren't you in school?"

“The school closed,” shouted the youngsters, “No more school! Villa’s troops are coming!”

“Zapata has been murdered! Now Obregon will be president!” Memo added.

My grandfather took Memo by the arm. “Enough!” he said and marched the young boy home, where his mother wept at his disarray, and his father said, “Guillermo must study! He is losing too many days. We will send him to the United States, where he can attend a Catholic school and live with a family I know who is traveling to New York City next week on official business.”

Memo recalled this day often as he lay in bed in the dormitory of the abandoned boys home waiting for the face of the clock to strike the next hour of the sleepless night. Mexico seemed very far away. He recalled the park and his playmates sadly, his dog waiting at the door, his younger sister dressing her dolls in silk skirts and bonnets, the odors of maiz freshly crushed by the cook for tortillas in the kitchen, the big bright room where his father’s books lined the shelves, and the sounds of the street vendors passing, calling their wares, “¿guajolotes?” “¿camotes calientes?” “¿leña?”. And what of Alvaro Obregon’s daily hike through the streets of la Capital on his way to the Presidential Palace? Was he still walking through Colonia Roma at 8:00 a.m. every morning, striding with great, long strides to keep physically ready for the next battle? Memo had waited by the gate for him to pass. They had then exchanged salutes, Obregon asking, “¿Y tu abuelo, adonde esta?” The eight year old boy had gestured to the house behind him, “¡Alli!”

Memo recalled these days often when he lay in bed in the dormitory for abandoned boys waiting for the face of the clock to strike the next hour of the sleepless night. He lay in a dark room of sleeping classmates, a dormitory that smelled of urine and dirty feet. Would he ever go home? Who would rescue him? Why had the money suddenly ceased to arrive

paying his room and board? Why had the compatriots, who had brought Memo to New York, insist that they could no longer provide for him? Had his father disowned him for playing in the park? What would he do in a country where he knew no one? Just then the clock across the street began to flash. As each number was struck the face of the electric clock flashed once accordingly. The huge face lit up one, two, three, four and on to twelve times. He pulled the pillow over his head so that his sobs would not wake the homeless boys whom the priests sheltered. He was thousands of miles from la Capital, alone.

During his childhood my father, Memo, lived with his family in Colonia Roma in Mexico City where the prehistoric lake had been settled by the Aztecs nine centuries earlier. Since the arrival of the invaders in 1519 the Spanish soldiers had cleared the pyramids, but it continued to be identified by the Nahuatl word “Zocalo” referring to the heart of the empire. The Spanish had spread out building palaces and churches thereby transforming the ancient landscape into one that was habitable to them, bringing a culture that was highly impractical for the lake bed. They built European palaces, and enormous churches that in the coming centuries would sink, with each recurring earthquake pulling walls apart. Here they lived with Indian women who bore the first mestizo children.

The house was designed by Luis Lamm with French flourishes, niches, wrought iron balconies, and pink carved stone parapets. The two story home was enjoyed by different generations of the family. My grandfather Bernardo and his wife Mercedes shared their home with Jose Luis, a gentleman of the old school, who spent his evenings playing chess with his son Bernardo in the big room with lots of books. The chess games often lasted all evening, therefore the children were forbidden to enter, so they retreated to the bedrooms upstairs, inventing games to entertain themselves. These regularly included the cat who was dressed in doll clothes until their mother appeared in the hallway insisting they bathe, say their prayers and go to bed. Otherwise, Memo, and his brother and

sister, spent the time in the kitchen with the cook pestering her for sweets, hot chocolate or cold tea. Their mother, Meche, knitted in the parlor, or organized tasks in the house.

At the end of the hall a shelf above which two small paintings of Christ made the space into a quiet retreat reminding the younger members that their heritage was from Spain, thereby dismissing any of the pagan superstition they might encounter among the populations that filled the streets. Several white candles made the shadows of the saints dance on the wall.

As Memo lay in bed recalling these days, Pancho Villa rode through Chihuahua with intention, disrupting routine, stability and communication by cutting the telegraph wires that communicated the citizens in Mexico City to their neighboring country to the north. The dangling telegraph wires were then used to hang the unfortunate priests in local parishes near-by.

Fortunately the telegraph wires were repaired within weeks and the telegram with money for Memo's upkeep was again deposited in the bank. Meanwhile, the brothers had managed to locate a Venezuelan family who attended their church for Sunday mass. They were kind people with two children of their own, and once approached agreed to take care of Memo. As a teenager I remember my father sitting at the dinning room table in front of his typewriter, writing yet another letter to the mysterious family in South America.

About the Author

Miriam was born in New York City in 1942 and promptly taken to la capital de Mexico where she spent her first twenty years living with her Mexican father and her American mother. Her bilingual education was completed at the American School in Mexico City where she studied the early curriculum of José Vasconcelos, which deeply engaged her in the history and culture of the country. Her graduate degrees in Mexican History and English Literature presaged her future interests, deepening her identity with, and her knowledge of, both countries. From 1968 to 1993, she was an art educator, and helped to pioneer a new understanding of how to foster creativity in children. She developed curriculum for their artistic and perceptual development, based on research and experience, first in Rome, then in Berkeley, California.

She also published poetry, short stories, and art reviews in the Bay Area including in the *East Bay Express.* She previously taught at the UC Berkeley Extension, founded the Berkeley Child Art Studio, was education director at the Mexican Museum, director of the Stockton Children's Museum, Director of the Museum of Craft and Folk Art in San Francisco, and Director of Education at Museo del Barrio in Manhattan NYC, as well as working in Mexico City with the Museo Nacional de Anthropologia, and in Guanajuato at the Alhóndiga de Granaditas, one of the great museums of Mexico's five century heritage. In Guanajuato, she published repeatedly with the Embajadoras Press and wrote a monograph, *Gerold Heinz Luft-Pavlata: a German Painter in Patzcuaro*, published in 2019 by Embajadoras Press. In her last years, she lived in the capital of the Mexican state of Guanajuato.

She traced her ancestry deep into pre- and post-Revolutionary Mexico, taking pride in the Basque name from her great aunt's side of the family in Puebla. As a child in the capital of the country, she studied the

documented history of life in Mexico after it ceased to be a colony of Spain, before it formed, in 1810, one of the first independent countries of the Americas. At the same time, she was reading books describing the independence revolt, plotted by Franklin and Washington, of the Thirteen British Colonies. Her passion for history comes from these early studies and from her dual U.S./Mexican ancestry and citizenship. While writing short stories and poetry in English, she explored the early history of the American colonists and the Mexican independence seekers. This earned degrees in history, English, and Spanish.

She influenced how art is taught to children by founding the Berkeley Child Art Studio, one of the first of its kind, where she documented the development of creative genius in young children as they discovered art. This work was *not* about teaching children how to do art like adults but about giving them space to explore their own unfiltered creative impulses. Through this experience she learned what was needed to teach art teachers new ways to foster creativity in children, and to understand the meaning and value of early scribbles and forms, too often sadly desprized, in children's art work. She was proud that some of her students went on to become successful professional artists and art educators.

This work put her in direct contact with historical, anthropological, and child art museums, and involved her in many art outreach projects. Her museum work and mounting exhibitions, put her in touch with many contemporary artists and the art scene on the East and West Coast of the U.S. and in Mexico. Art often inspired her poetry.

Miriam de Uriarte died on 5 July 2024 as this collection was nearing completion.